



THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study presented here is an examination of the political status of Islam in Southeast Asia both as a religion and a vital determinant of ethnic identity. We conclude that the two phenomena of Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic "neomodernism" will be important variables in the evolution of politics in the region.

Although the manifestations differ from country to country, throughout Southeast Asia, the Islamic consciousness of its nearly 160 million Muslims has been raised. This is in part an extension of the global resurgence of the Islamic identity. The dynamics of Islamic politics in the six domestic settings of ASEAN can only partially be explained, however, by externalities of the "Islamic Revolution."

The assertion by fundamentalists of the demand for an orthodoxy in which all institutions of society will conform to Islamic law (shari'a) is rejected by the incumbent elites of Malaysia and Indonesia as incompatible with the demands of modernization. In Malaysia the strategy has been adaptive accommodation and cooptation. In Indonesia the approach has been to legally "depoliticize" Islam. In both cases, the fundamentalist extreme presents some threat of political violence.

In the Philippines and Thailand, the Muslim problem is one of separatism. In neither case does it appear probable that the maximum goals will be realized. In the Philippines, however, the evolution of Muslim autonomy will be closely connected to the outcome of the wider political crisis. In both Thailand and the Philippines there are possible scenarios of separatist alliance with communist insurgents.

The two mini-states of Brunei and Singapore contrast sharply. Brunei is the most thoroughly Islamized state in ASEAN, while the Muslim minority in Singapore is socially and economically disadvantaged.

Nowhere in Southeast Asia do we find any real prospect of Islamic fundamentalist seizure of political power in the sense of a clerical wresting of the state from secular leadership. Yet, throughout the region the political culture is being infused with Islamic values. Islam in its "neomodernist" guise provides an alternative political ideology for the modern state in competition with capitalism and socialism. Great attention should be paid to the linkage between Islam and real social and economic grievances in urban centers in particular.

At this point, the foreign policy implications for the United States of political Islam in Southeast Asia seem limited. There has been some value distancing as the anti-western orientation of the Islamic revitalization proceeds, but this does not seem reflected in state behavior. The most important foreign policy dimension that may be affected will be interactions in ASEAN itself both: instrumentally in terms of support from Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia for minorities in the Philippines and Thailand. As the Islamicization process at the Malay-Indonesian-Brunei core continues the potential for the disruption of ASEAN concord will increase.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. MALAYSIA.....	15
III. INDONESIA.....	38
IV. PHILIPPINES.....	58
V. THAILAND.....	74
VI. SINGAPORE.....	86
VII. BRUNEI.....	95
VIII. CONCLUSIONS.....	101

IV THE PHILIPPINESIntroduction.

The Muslim minority in the Philippines numbers 2.5 million or about five percent of a total population that is largely Catholic Christian. The Muslims are concentrated in the south, being a majority in five provinces in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. While they can be broadly thought of as the northern extension of the Malay Islamic culture, collectively called Moros (once a term of opprobrium but today used proudly), this is not an ethnic definition of the community. Filipino Muslims consist of ten ethnolinguistic groups. Three groups form the great majority: Maguindanao (Cotabato, Sutan Kudarat, and Maguindanao provinces); Maranao (North and South Lanao provinces); and Tausug (Jolo island in Sulu). An Islamic sense of belonging to the ummat has been limited by the fiercely defended separate cultural identities over centuries of ethnic conflict. The ethnic divisions are reinforced by differing degrees of Islamicization among the groups, from the orthodoxy of the Tausug, the first to embrace Islam in the 14th century, to the indigenous syncretism (animism) of the Bajau sea people. Nevertheless, despite the many differences among the groups, they do share a common stock of Islamic cultural, social, and legal institutions. When, as in recent years, pressed by external non-Muslim forces, the commonality of Islam prevails over ethnic distinction.

Historically, it was Filipino Muslim sultanates in Sulu and Mindanao that gave supra-village political structure to pre-colonial Philippines. It was Muslim authority that the Spanish displaced from Manila in the 16th century. The Spanish aggressively spread crusading christianity against the Asian variety of the hated Moors (hence Moro). The bloody frontier between Dar al-Harb and Dar al-Islam was at the Manguindanao and Sulu sultanates.

Spanish pacification of Mindanao was not accomplished until shortly before the U.S. displaced Spain as sovereign.

American authority was imposed in the course of a guerilla war. The U.S., first directly in occupation, and then through Christian Filipinos, brought a new kind of colonialism to the Muslims. Secular law, education, and administration contradicted the customary law and traditional authority. As the colonial regime developed and moved towards full internal self-government, Muslim leaders argued for a separate Muslim state. When the commitment to Philippines independence was made, Muslim leaders unsuccessfully pressed for a separate independent Muslim state.

Muslim concern about their status in the new Philippines nation was soon translated into fear and hostility towards national policies that exaggerated their vulnerabilities as a small minority out of the mainstream of the Manila-centric political economy. The government actively encouraged the migration of Christian Filipinos to the south. Religious violence, particularly in the Manguindanao regions where Christian penetration was most felt, was a regular feature of intergroup relations. The violence can be easily categorized as Muslim - Christian, but although sectarian strife was rampant in '50s and '60, the underlying structure of social conflict was more complex than simply a matter of religious antagonisms.

Political and economic grievances festered as the local administrations staffed by Christian officials seemed to favor the Christian population. The application of the national cadastral system in what were seen as partisan courts led to large scale alienation of land held in customary ownership by Muslims. Moro discontent was heightened by so-called "development" projects such as large scale lumbering and mining concessions, often held by foreigners, obtained through Manila middle men manipulating the national legal system to Muslims disadvantage.

Political Background.

As the Muslims seemed less and less capable of defending their interests in the national political system, the always latent appeal of secession became more attractive. The 1968 Corregidor affair was a watershed event. As part of its on and off diplomatic pursuit of a residual claim to sovereignty in the Malaysian state of Sabah, Manila apparently planned clandestine military operations in Sabah itself. Muslims were recruited and given special warfare training. Pay issues led to a Muslim mutiny in March, 1968, after which 28 Muslims were summarily executed. This incensed the Muslims of the south and sparked outrage in Malaysia. A direct political result was the founding of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in May 1968, which had military training links to Malaysia.

The MIM flowed out of old Muslim politics. It was established by the venerable Cotabato traditional leader Datu Udtog Matalam. The MIM gave some systematic form to what had become endemic violence in the name of religion, but its goal was reduced to autonomy in a kind of federal system. Meanwhile a new Muslim elite was emerging whose socialization was not that of tradition but of education in the Middle East and Philippine universities. Their Islamic consciousness and political expectations were fed by their contacts in the wider Muslim world. The political phenomenon that was occurring in the '60s was the transmogrification of religious identity and ethnicity into a modern Islamic nationalism -- that of the Bangsa Moro -- with economic and political goals. This was represented by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) for which, in a sense, the MIM had prepared the ground.

The MNLF, led by Nur Misuari, a University of the Philippines political scientist, was not a religious movement. Islam was the cement of an ideology that was self-consciously nationalist, subordinating ethnic

division to the Moro identity. It was radically anti-traditional, committed programatically to social and economic change that would restructure Moro society in the name of Islamic values of justice and equity. The MNLF provided the Moros, for the first time, a unified leadership with a full political program that demanded the creation of an independent state carved out of 25 provinces in Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan, and Palawan.

The declaration of martial law in 1972 ended any possibility of moderate Muslim bargaining in an open political system. The political field was left to the MNLF which by 1972 was engaged in a war of secession. At its peak in the mid-70s, the MNLF fielded 20,000 - 30,000 guerillas and controlled large stretches of the western Mindanao and Sulu country side, even threatening some cities. At the height of the bleeding war, up to 50,000 Philippine Armed Forces troops were tied down in the south. Casualties were high, particularly among civilians, and tales of atrocities from both sides were often heard. The MNLF's military capabilities were considerably enhanced by the availability of Sabah as a training site, resupply center, and sanctuary. Through Malaysia's Sabah state, material aid was funneled from Libya. This strategic vantage was considerably diminished after Kuala Lumpur forced the resignation of Sabah's Chief Minister Tun Mustafa, whose had cooperated with the MNLF.

From the outset the MNLF internationalized their struggle against Manila in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference (IFMC). The MNLF's diplomacy, strongly backed by Libya, sought to wring concessions from the government by threatening through its Middle East supporters to constrain an energy import dependent Philippines' oil supply. The MNLF was only partially successful. The international Islamic forums became gravely concerned about the conditions of Filipino Muslims, and their attention to this did lead to some moderation

in the government's political and military tactics. Importantly for Manila, however, was the fact that the MNLF's secessionist goal was not accepted by the IFMC which instead in 1974 called for direct negotiations between Manila and the MNLF for a "just solution to the plight of the Filipino Muslims within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines."

The relative mildness of the IFMC's posture reflects at least in part the mediatory roles of Indonesia and Malaysia. Although both countries, given their Muslim populations, have an interest in the treatment of Filipino Muslims, the prospect of secession raises problems for regional peace and order and the ASEAN system. Furthermore, a successful secessionist movement in the Philippines might have a spillover or demonstration effect in their own political systems. Malaysia - Philippines relations were somewhat improved when President Marcos at the 1977 ASEAN summit renounced any claim to Sabah. This has not been followed up, however, by constitutional action in Manila to implement the renunciation. The continued linkage of the Philippine's Sabah claim and alleged support to the MNLF from Sabah still strains the bilateral relationship and has been a key internal text of ASEAN harmony.

With both Manila and the MNLF being pressed for a peaceful resolution by the external Islamic states, including the now compromising Libya, an agreement was reached in Tripoli in December 1976, providing for a cease-fire and proposed terms of a settlement. The settlement called for "autonomy" for the Muslims in 13 provinces. Autonomy was to include shari'a courts, internal self-government and administration, guaranteed sources of revenue, etc., with foreign policy and national defense left to the central government. The cease-fire went into effect in January 1977, but broke down

later the same year with the collapse of negotiations on the implementation of the autonomy proposals. President Marcos then proceeded to unilaterally implement the Tripoli agreement in a manner that made "autonomy" a symbolic reality but substantively a hollow fiction. In 1979, two regional assemblies were established in Region IX (Zamboanga and Sulu) and Region XII (Lanao and Cotabato provinces) covering 13 provinces. Although boycotted by the MNLF, the 1982 elections to the regional assemblies and a number of Muslim cooptations to official positions on the local, regional, and national level gave the government wider political options in bargaining with the Muslims. In 1981, a Ministry of Muslim Affairs was established. In 1982, the government announced that it would establish shari'a court in Muslim areas. Educational assistance was provided to traditional Muslim schools (madrasahs).

In an ironic fashion the diplomacy of the MNLF back-fired. By forcing the Manila regime to deal with the international ramifications of its policy in the south, it provided the government with the opportunity to fend off the impatience of the OIC by acts trying to show good faith in its strivings for peace in the south. Promises of infrastructure development were designed to promote a vision of economic development. Personal diplomacy by President Marcos and Mrs Marcos --for example the 1982 visit of Marcos to Saudi Arabia -- also helped keep the international initiative away from the MNLF.

The MNLF, checked militarily by the costly deployment of the Philippines Armed Forces and diplomatically constrained by the unwillingness of the OIC to sanction the Philippines, fell upon hard times. By the early '80s the level of fighting had considerably diminished. From the large unit actions of the '70s, the MNLF's tactics turned increasingly to terror bombings, kidnappings, extortion, and other headline grabbing but strategically inconsequential actions. After nearly a decade of bloodshed a

Muslim population brutalized by both sides looked for other alternatives than simply the continuation of violence as presented by the MNLF. Beset by internal divisions its expatriate leadership could not control, the MNLF's cohesion crumbled. Mass defections and well publicized surrenders brought more and more Moro secessionist leaders and followers back to the fold. A number were to assume roles in the new government-sponsored Moro regional structures. By comparative quantitative measures from the south in the mid-70s, it can be asserted that by the end of 1982, the government had the military situation with the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) well in hand. The Moro problem remains. The issues that drove the MNLF into armed opposition persist, and the situation in the south is no more secure for Manila as the war being fought by the Communist Party of the Philippines' New People's Army (NPA) expands across Mindanao.

Current Status.

The highest government estimates place BMA forces today at 6-7,000 strong although Misuari from his exile headquarters still claims 30,000 fighters. The government figure is probably more accurate if we take into account the current limited numbers of armed contact with the BMA. Fire fights are sporadic and scattered. From ambush, the BMA can occasionally still hit a patrol, creating new casualties on both sides. The insurgents still carry out kidnappings for ransom, including foreigners. By and large, however, a peaceful Moro front has allowed the government to redeploy its troops in the south to face the more serious insurgent threat presented today by the NPA in Christian populated eastern and northern Mindanao. MNLF commanders continue to come down out of the hill with their followers. For example, Basilan's "Commander Gerry" [Salapuddin] brought out a thousand in June, 1984. He will join other MNLF guerilla leaders who have governmental

posts in autonomous Regions IX and XII like "Commander Ronnie" [Amelil Malaguio] who came out with a thousand men in 1980 to become Chairman of the Region XII Executive Council. The cooptation process continues in the framework of Marcos's one-sided implementation of the Tripoli agreement.

The government's success in containing the Moro insurgency has created a kind of negative peace in Moroland resulting from the military exhaustion of the insurgents, the war weariness of the people, and the failure of the expatriate MNLF leadership to maintain its cohesion. While the OIC continues to recognize the MNLF as the representative of the Philippine Muslims, the government can ask, with justification, which "responsible group" should be dealt with. The inability of the MNLF to give continuity to a single voice for the politics of Islam illustrates again the issues of creating internal Muslim political unity that is apparent elsewhere in Southeast Asia. There are at least four Moro political factions whose division is based on ethnic cleavage and programmatic disagreements.

For the OIC, the MNLF continues to be led by Nur Misuari. Long based in Tripoli, Misuari may have moved his headquarters to Iran. His armed supporters were drawn from the Tausugs and other Suluanos. He adheres to his demand for a Moro state that would encompass most of the Philippines south and which, despite Misuari's inflated claims of the Muslim population, would be one in which Muslims would be a minority ruling a Christian majority. His radical Islamic socialism threatens the power base of traditional Islamic leadership in Moroland. His influence from afar on internal developments in the south has waned corresponding to his diminished ability to deliver material support from external supporters.

A Cotabato Maguindanaon MNLF faction is loyal to fundamentalist Hashim Salamat, a former member of the MNLF Central Committee, who split with Misuari in 1975. Salamat is an Islamic scholar who was educated in Cairo

and maintains his expatriate base there. The MNLF Reform Group is led by Dimos Pundato whose ethnic support comes from the Maranao of North Lanao province. He is reported to be closer to the Mindanao scene from a Sabah base. Pundato advances the more politically realistic goal of real autonomy in areas predominantly Muslim. Finally, there is the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization led by Jeddah-based Rashim Lucman, a Maranao. His brand of Islamic conservatism contrasts sharply with the original MNLF and its international support from radical Arab sources. The BMLO, like Hashim Salamat's MNLF faction, is more sympathetic to traditional Muslim social order in the Philippines.

Efforts to reconcile the expatriate Muslim factions have been unavailing to date. The January, 1983 Karachi "unity" conference was boycotted by all expatriate groups except Rashim Lucman's BMLO group who met then with a self-proclaimed group of Muslim community leaders from the Philippines itself. The shredding of unity at the center has had negative consequences in the field as the less "revolutionary" (as opposed to Islamic consciousness) have been the easiest to tempt out of the field. Salamat's Manguindanaons have provided a number of the defections. The internal divisions in organized Muslim political opposition obviously facilitate Manila's diplomatic and political policies of divide et impera.

Overarching the fissure lines that factionally divide the armed Moro separatists are the fissure lines that divide them from the non-insurgent Muslims in the south. In the first place, there is the traditional Muslim leadership in the datus and village religious leaders. Then there are those Muslims who have new vested political and economic interests in the success of the new regional institutions. And, of course, there is the great bulk of the Muslim population to whom the war was a cruel human and economic

burden. Perhaps indicative of the new passivity in the south is resurgent interest in government supported Muslim activity in Islamic education, Qu`ran study, voluntary self-help organizations, and other non-(overt) political activity.

Future Projections.

A discussion of the future of Muslim politics in the Philippines must first be set in the context of the general political and economic crisis that afflicts the society. Although President Marcos still wields the instruments of power, uncertainty abounds about the future. All of the indicators of political instability are magnified by the conjuncture of the maneuverings of succession politics and economic disaster in a psychological environment conditioned by repression and violence. Whether or not Marcos is "toppled" or there is a "constitutional" succession the status quo ante will not be recovered. The political evolution of the Muslim question will be touched by politics at the center and the availability of critically scarce economic resources.

Whatever the political outcome of the current crisis in terms of regime -- palace coup, military intervention, democratic opposition, radical leftist -- we assume that any post-Marcos regime will be resistant to the ultimate Muslim demand of separatism and will seek to preserve the territorial and political integrity of the state. Where they may vary will be in their willingness to accommodate demands for regional autonomy.

The relative peace that has settled over Moroland is instable, depending not on a fundamental reorientation of Muslim consciousness, but on a continued willingness of the government to accomodate "reasonable" demands for substantial autonomy in a national framework of peace and economic development. The government's capabilities will be sorely tested

at both levels. Three factors in particular need to be considered: (1) majority constraints on how much can be done for a minority; (2) the impact of a contemporary national political disorder in the Philippines on the Moros; and (3) the CPP and NPA.

The government continues to implement in its own way the Tripoli agreement. Most recently (April 1985), Marcos finally announced the release of funds for the establishment of the long promised shari'a courts for Muslim personal law. Although severely curtailed in practice by the general economic collapse, the policy commitment to Muslim equal economic opportunity in terms of investment of national resources into Muslim development continues to be wielded as evidence of government sincerity. It should be noted that in the national framework the Muslims are not the only disadvantaged Filipinos. The majority may ask, what is the "fair share."

Most problematic, however, is how far the government can go with respect to the "moderate" Muslims' bottom line demand for substantial political autonomy. The government will move reluctantly -- if at all -- to the melding of the existing two regional into the single Muslim autonomous region envisioned in the Tripoli agreement. Even though the 13 provinces are but 60 percent of the MNLF's claimed Moro "homeland," Christians are a majority. This demographic fact, while perhaps polemically explained by Moro invocation of Christian immigration into Moroland, cannot be politically ignored (leaving democratic theory about one man one vote out of the analysis altogether). The already militantly polarized Christian community would resist politically on the national level, and with guns on the local level, the full imposition of minority Muslim rule. Even in the Muslim community that stayed loyal there is some concern about the way in which the MNLF defectors have been welcomed back with positions of authority and allowed to retain their weapons.

Since the ending of martial law in 1981, the Muslims have sought to use the national political crisis as a lever for their interests. In a highly publicized manner, Senator Aquino tried to mediate personally the breaches in the MNLF and then to draw the MNLF into a united front with the national opposition forces. The threat of renewed separatism has been used as a political lever but without success in forcing democratic accommodation by the government. In the political turmoil after Aquino's killing, leading non-MNLF Muslim politicians associated themselves with Jaime Cardinal Sin's call for "national reconciliation and justice for all," warning in a kind of manifesto (October 7, 1983) that if Marcos did not accede to the demands for human and political rights, "we may be constrained to reassert the historic identity of the Moro Nation."

It is difficult to see how in contemporary Philippines succession politics any deal can be cut by Muslim autonomists with democratic oppositionists that could realistically ignore the constraints that will be in place for any central government in their dealings with the south, let alone giving them the kind of guarantees that would bring the MNLF back into the fold. In fact, only the National Democratic Front, generally considered a CPP umbrella, has accepted (for tactical purposes) the notion of Muslim self-determination. While the democratic opposition may wish to enlist the Muslims for electoral purposes in a peaceful transition to a post-Marcos era, their goal -- power at the center -- only becomes relevant to the autonomists in as much as it moves them in the direction of a contrary goal -- devolution of power from the center. Such a devolution, if substantive in a kind of "federalizing" structure would satisfy the minimal demands of the Muslim moderates but not the radical elements of the MNLF.

From the vantage point of the MNLF, a non-peaceful transition to the

post-Marcos era, marked by either coup or protracted internal war might provide greater opportunities for autonomy or secession, perhaps in alliance with other forces, as a besieged central authority finds itself unable to deploy resources against a resurgent BMA. It is in this aspect of contemporary politics that we find possibly a future link to the the other war in the south: the NPA's.

The principal armed threat in the Philippines comes from the NPA. Its alarming growth in the past two years is well known, in the words of the recent Senate staff report, The Situation in the Philippines (October 1984), "challenging the government in many parts of the country." The challenge is growing in Mindanao. For several years NPA activity in its operational areas in the south has overshadowed the MNLF and has been the Philippine military's major concern. Philippine officials have always worried about potential tactical alliance between the two forces, but to date no joint operations or common strategy can be documented. Naturally, as they tie down the military and erode the legitimacy of Manila's authority, their separate wars are complementary. The Moro's struggle is defined by particularistic Islam and Bangsa Moro nationalism, in contrast to the secular universalism of Marxism-Leninism. We would note, however, at least two possible future developments which might change the relationship between the Moro community and the communists.

The NPA has wooed the MNLF and publicly, through the NDF, has supported self-determination. Furthermore, the Misuari faction of the MNLF does have its own vision of a kind of Islamic socialism. As the MNLF's basis of support in traditional ethnicities erodes and the NPA's strength grows, there may be a temptation for the Moro radicals to become a partner in the struggle against tactically, if not strategically, the common enemy. That

this might be happening is suggested by the January, 1985 report of a new MNLF faction, the Philippine Democratic Revolution (PDR), which plans to join forces with the NPA in Mindanao.

The PDR, if it in fact exists, may, on the other hand, represent a new NPA front organization designed to mobilize elements of the Muslim population to the communist-led revolutionary struggle. We are reminded of the Communist Party of Malaya's various tactics to engage Malay Muslims in their revolution. However that may be, certainly the kinds of socio-economic grievances and excesses of military repression that have mobilized Christians in the south to the NPA exist as well in the Muslim region. Unlike the situation for the CPM, the environment in Mindanao is not racially divided. Christian and Muslim alike are Filipino, and the NPA provides an ethnically neutral structure for both to cooperate on the basis of secular interest and with the promise of confessional equality. Even if large measures of autonomy should be granted to Muslims, the perception of economic exploitation within the Muslim community as economic modernization spreads and the penetration of global capitalism creates new wealth unevenly distributed might lead to a greater number of recruits for the NPA, particularly from those Moros who today are physically or affectively caught up in a losing MNLF struggle. If the one future possibility is an NPA - MNLF alliance, the other is an NPA - MNLF rivalry. In either case, the NPA seems to have more to win in the long run than the MNLF. It is to be doubted that a communist or communist influenced regime in the Philippines would be any less jealous of the integrity of the state than its predecessors.

Policy Implications.

The policy problems presented by the problem of Muslims separatism in the Philippines relate both to internal developments in that troubled nation

and its relations with its friends and allies. To the degree to which Muslim insurgency in the south, either autonomously or more worrisome in alliance with the NPA, aggravates general insecurity and contributes to the incremental collapse of the regime, U.S. political and security interests are involved. It is not necessary here to outline the various scenarios with respect to the U.S. bases that might eventuate if an unfriendly government should succeed Marcos.

There is no reason to be sanguine about the situation even if a peaceful transition to a democratic-centrist government can be managed. Such a government will still be faced with the problem of revolutionary insurgency. If resurgent Moslem warriors, even in alliance with the NPA, successfully cast their appeal in terms of self-determination, there will be renewed international pressures on Manila. Furthermore, U.S. assistance to Manila will be opposed by domestic opponents of Manila as aiding the "genocidal" suppression of a minority.

The status of the Muslims in the south will continue to be a factor in the Philippines relations with Malaysia and Indonesia. As previously noted the problems of Muslim minorities in Southeast Asia remain on the agenda of Islamic organizations in It is quite possible that as Islamic consciousness continues to be raised in those countries, governments might seek to deflect some of the domestic impact by focussing attention on external Islamic causes. In such a case there would be a negative impact on ASEAN solidarity and harmony. Moreover, the restraining influence which both Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur seem to have exercised in international Islamic organizations with respect to the Philippines would be less forthcoming.

Even in the more likely event that the broader framework of Indonesian and Malaysian noninterference remains intact, the Sabah - Moroland connection will continue to plague Philippines - Malaysian bilateral

relations. Kuala Lumpur's restraint in this regard is tested by the inconstancy of the Philippines' position on sovereignty. There has been no constitutional follow-through on the Marcos 1977 renunciatory pledge. Manila's ambivalence in this regard was again demonstrated in 1984, when Philippine Foreign Minister Tolentino said that the government's renunciation did not prejudice any proprietary rights of the Sultan of Sulu to Sabah. Assuming that the issue of Sabah's sovereignty could be put definitively behind them, there still remains the problem of more than 100,000 Muslim Filipino "immigrants" (refugees) in Sabah. The refugee population is a source of support for Muslim insurgency in the Philippines, a burden on the social services of Sabah, a new internal security threat, and an irritant in Sabah - Kuala Lumpur relations. In Sabah itself, Malay Muslims are a domestic minority population advantaged by the Islamicization policies of the federal government. A possible "internationalization" of the refugee issue through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees may take some of the heat out of the domestic and bilateral exchanges.